

*History of
Actual Trek of Gardner Expedition*

*The Story
As told in:*

“Under Wasatch Skies”

*A History of
Wasatch County*

1858 — 1900



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*The story as told
in DWP Book "Under
Wasatch Skies"* →

History of Wasatch County

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND TO SETTLEMENT

The settlement of Provo Valley is not an example of isolated colonization. Rather it came near the end of an intensive period of Mormon colony planting in Utah. The settlers who came here had earned the title of pioneers in the struggle across the plains and in the establishment of towns and cities in the Salt Lake and Utah Valleys. It will be necessary to survey the extent of colonization and the religious, political, and economic conditions in Utah prior to 1858 and 1859 to understand the Provo Valley settlement.

In 1847 Brigham Young and the first company of Mormon pioneers traced a path across the Great American Desert to the Salt Lake Valley. This path later became familiar to thousands of Latter-day Saints, who came from all sections of the United States and Northern Europe. Most of them had had little experience in the type of colonizing venture posed by the Great Basin settlement. Their westward journey was prompted by religious rather than economic motives, and only under the skillful direction of Brigham Young and the Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were the many heterogeneous family groups molded into successful communities.¹

The first colonizing efforts were concentrated in the Salt Lake Valley. Settlement elsewhere in the region was prefaced by a series of explorations under the direction of Brigham Young. These expeditions not only searched for sites on which new communities could be founded

¹Milton Hunter, *Brigham Young the Colonizer* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press 1940), p. 62.

but they also surveyed for timber, water supply, grazing possibilities, and the altitude of the mountain peaks.²

One such exploration was undertaken by a company composed of Robert and William Gardner and J. D. Parks. In September of 1852 they followed up the Weber River to its headwaters and from thence down the Provo River looking for timber and investigating the river for the purpose of floating logs down to the central settlements. William Gardner kept an account of their travels, and his description of the Provo Valley was the chief factor in opening up the region six years later. After describing the great amount of timber in the upper valleys of the Weber and Provo Rivers, he tells of following the road some twelve or fifteen miles down the Provo River to a valley seven by ten miles in extent with two large streams coming from the south into it.

Our attention was attracted by mounds about the size of a coal pit to one that appeared to be about a mile off, and which we judged to be about a quarter of a mile across and sixty feet high. They all are about the shape of a coal pit, perfectly hollow. We supposed them to be a volcano as the surface of the ground for some miles was covered with this light stone the same as the mounds, but finding some of them full of water we concluded that the formation was made by the water.³

After exploring this now famous landmark and noting that the valley could be easily irrigated they passed on to within about five miles of the mouth of the Provo Canyon. Gardner notes that the distance from their camp to the valley that connected the Provo and Weber Rivers was about twenty-five or thirty miles and a road could easily be built all the way. His description of the canyon and the river are especially significant.

²Ibid., p. 32.

³Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, MSS, (L. D. S. Historian's Office Library, Salt Lake City, Utah), September 13, 1852. Hereafter cited as Journal History.

We continued the journey down to Utah Valley and noticed two large streams coming in on the south and one on the north. The last ten miles travel was pretty rough, but a good road could be built without much trouble by cutting into the side hill at different points, only loose rock being in the way and the Provo River is as handsome a stream for floating purposes as could be desired, it is not so rapid as the Weber River and the channel is deeper, but it's pretty rough at the mouth of the canyon, which is the best canyon for a road that I have ever seen, having fine narrow valleys with rich soil and good pasture. At the present time I think that there is more water in this river than in the Weber River. A continuation of settlements from the mouth of the Weber around to the mouth of the Provo, a distance of about 120 miles, could easily be made. From the mouth of the Weber to the headwaters of the same the distance must be about 100 miles. Good roads could be made without much expense except the last ten miles and the streams can also be utilized pretty well for floating down timber.⁴

This was not the first time the region had been visited. Gardner called the valley of the cones William's Valley because a party of that name had camped there some five years before.⁵ The significance of the Gardner expedition is that it was undertaken with the intent to explore the valley for timber and possible colonization. The suggestions he made were followed when the time came to open up the area.

The settlement of Utah Valley preceded that of Provo Valley and most of the early settlers in Provo Valley were originally residents of the former. The first settlers to Provo were sent out as early as April 1849.⁶ By 1852 such settlements as Lehi, Fort Alpine,

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ray Colton, "A Historical Study of the Exploration of Utah Valley and the True Story of Fort Utah," (Unpublished Master's thesis, Dept. of History, Brigham Young University, 1935), p. 56.

Pleasant Grove, Springville, Spanish Fork, Payson, and Santaquin were growing communities in and near Utah Valley.⁷ Thus, by the time the first settlements in Provo Valley were made, communities in the surrounding region were well established.

The settlements in Provo Valley were typical of Latter-day Saint settlements throughout the Great Basin, and it would therefore seem necessary to outline briefly the role of the Mormon Church in Utah at this time.

The migration of the Mormons to Mexican territory had been under the direction of the Church, and it was only natural that the Church should continue the supervision of colonization and settlement of the pioneers. Brigham Young, as president of the Church, together with the Council of the Twelve Apostles, administered affairs until the necessary civil and ecclesiastical machinery could be established for the new-born communities. The Church leaders continued to plant colonies long after the organization of Utah as a United States territory in 1850.

The groups who went out were usually provided with a bishop as the leader. In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints the bishop is the head of an ecclesiastical unit known as a ward. The ward in turn is composed of family groups living in close proximity to one another. All over Utah, cities were built, lands divided off to the people, roads and bridges made, water ditches cut, and land irrigated and society governed under the immediate control of the bishops.⁸ The bishop also had judicial functions and early in Utah history adjusted disputes among Church members and in some cases among non-members.

By the time the first settlements were made in what was later to be Wasatch County, Utah had been made a

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁸Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 366: "By 1878 some 358 colonies had been established under this system."

territory. A rather turbulent period followed in which some of the federal territorial appointees, seeking political advantage, made charges of treason and other crimes against the Mormons in Utah. Finally, in 1857 President Buchanan, fearful of the linkage of the Mormon practice of polygamy with the Democratic Party's issue of popular sovereignty, appointed Alfred Cumming as governor of Utah Territory and sent a *posse comitatus* consisting of United States' troops to see that he reached his destination.

Brigham Young, distrustful of the motives for sending such a force, prepared the Saints for the defense of their lives and liberties by calling out the Utah militia and ordering an evacuation of the members living in the Salt Lake Valley. It was only under the skillful mediation of Thomas L. Kane that an understanding was reached by which Governor Cumming entered Salt Lake City while the body of troops passed through to Cedar Valley some thirty-six miles south of Salt Lake City, where they established Camp Floyd early in July of 1858.

It is at this point that the series of events which culminated in the development of Provo Valley and the establishment of Wasatch County began.

nel which later gave access to the Park Utah Mine—the largest mine in Wasatch County.¹³

The Park Utah mine was to come into being in 1916 when George W. Lambourne and George D. Blood would combine forces to develop holdings east of the Ontario mine. Permission was to be secured to work through the Ontario drain tunnel, and the venture would develop so successfully that by 1922 the Park Utah mine would be producing 6,000 tons of lead, silver, and zinc ore per month, worth fifty dollars a ton.¹⁴

Later development would see the consolidation of the Park Utah, Daly Judge, and Ontario mining companies into the Park Utah Consolidated Mines Company in 1925.¹⁵ These mines would, in the course of time, greatly enrich Wasatch County and its inhabitants, who would work in the mines and furnish it with supplies.

The mining fever accompanying the rich strikes in the Park City area was also felt on the other side of the mountain range, especially in the Snake Creek area of the Provo Valley. Here many claims were staked out by the Mormon pioneer settlers who originally came to the valley for farming and stock raising. These settlers formed the Snake Creek mining district in May of 1870.¹⁶

To the Snake Creek district came a motley group of mining enthusiasts, and the nearby town of Midway experienced a mining boom at the turn of the century. Many claims were staked out up and down Snake Creek Canyon, and men discussed the relative merits of such holdings as the Steamboat property, Lions, Wide West,

¹³Emmett K. Olson, "Mining Methods of Park Utah Consolidated Mines Company" (Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Utah, 1950), p. 4.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁵Olsen, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

¹⁶By Laws of the Snake Creek Mining District, (Heber 1930), p. 1.

Heber City, Big Four, Balsam Grove, Bogan Property, Lone Pine, Southern Tier, St. Louis Vassar, Wolverine, Success, the Tattersal Property, and Boulder Basin.¹⁷

Some rich ore was found, and in the case of the Southern Tier, \$80,000 worth was reportedly shipped to Park City.¹⁸ In general, however, the ore deposits proved pockety and spotty; and this, coupled with the water problem so prevalent in the region round about, brought a disappointing end to the hopes of those who staked out the area.

Despite the disappointment of the many mining interests, the boom was of real significance to Midway. It meant a period of prosperity comparable to that prompted earlier by the stage coach contract and the building of the railroad through Utah. Many a family income was augmented by the work in the mines. It was also a period of romance and adventure. The usual topics of daily discussion gave way to mining speculations, the fortunes to be made and spent, the diggings at Bonanza Flat, and the new arrivals at the Aggie O'Neil Hotel. Some of the wealthy speculators from the East even brought their libraries with them and bestowed them on a culture hungry people when they left.¹⁹

Mining activity benefited Wasatch County in many ways. It furnished much needed work, both in the mines and related activities such as lumbering and farming, and it furnished considerable revenue for many county projects and responsibilities.

LUMBERING

When William Gardner made his report to Brigham Young of the exploration of the Provo and Weber river valleys he told of the plentiful supply of timber there.

¹⁷*Wasatch Wave*, December 21, 1906.

¹⁸Emily Coleman, interview, 1952.

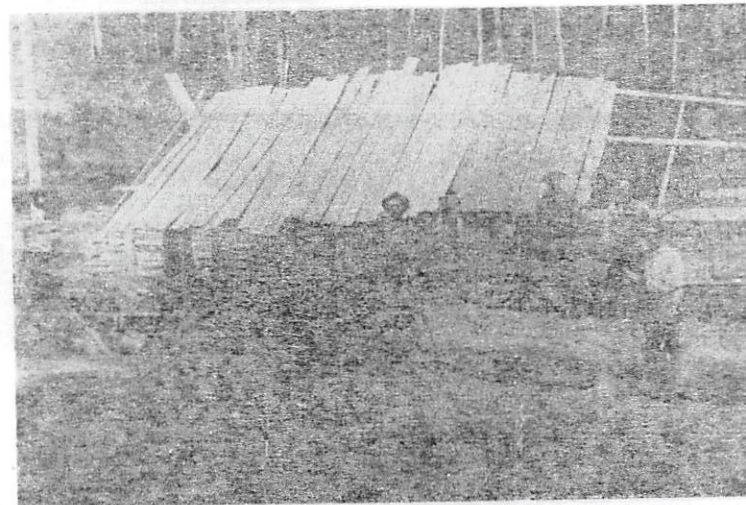
¹⁹Lethe Tatge, interview, 1952.

Indeed, one of Brigham Young's chief purposes in building the Provo Canyon road was to make this timber readily available.²⁰ In this region were millions of board feet of marketable saw timber. In addition to the main stands of Douglas fir and Engelmann spruce there were vast stands of aspen and scattered stands of white and alpine fir, all of which were heavily logged as the region was opened.

Saw mills began to spring forth all over the valley as soon as the settlers arrived. In the winter of 1859-60 William Meeks and James Adams with companions went up Center Creek Canyon and got out timber for a saw mill. This was the pioneer saw mill in the Provo Valley, and it began turning out lumber in the fall of 1860.²¹

²⁰*Journal History*, June 6, 1858, p. 2.

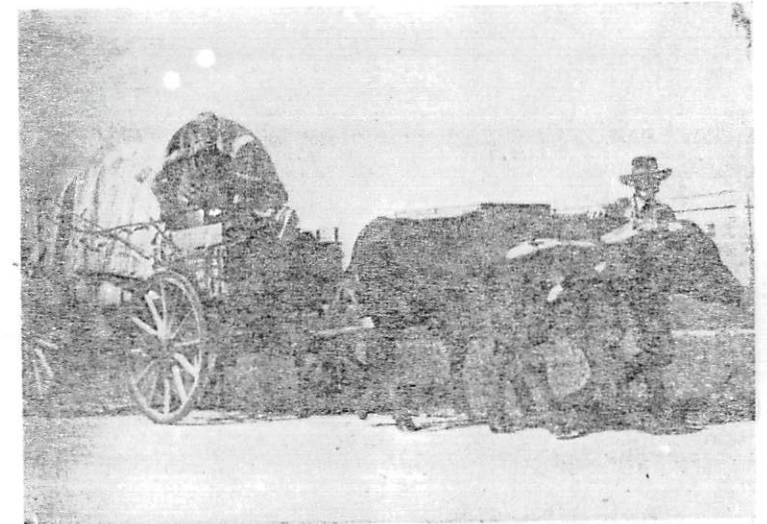
²¹Crook, "History of Wasatch County," *op. cit.*, p. 7.



Thacker's early sawmill: Charles Thacker standing center and John M. Thacker right rear.

Next was Peter Shirts with a mill on Snake Creek, followed by the Lake Creek Mills of Nicol and Alexander, the Carroll mill in Heber, and the Watkins mill on Deer Creek. Other mills were built by Forman on Daniel Creek, Henry Coleman on the lower Snake Creek, and McGuire, Turner and Campbell mills on the South Fork of Provo River.

The mills were first run with water power from the creeks but later steam was introduced. Logging was done with oxen, and it would be difficult to overestimate the importance of these animals in the pioneering venture. They were particularly valuable in lumbering. Here they were preferred even over horses. They were steady and not easily excited. Where horses, when pulling a heavy load would saw back and forth or would balk, the oxen would steady down and pull harder and harder. Oxen could get over the logs easier and could go



Freighting by oxen

through loose mud and snow where horses would bog down. Oxen were not as expensive as horses since they did not require grain for feed.

Dave Thacker reports an experience of Homer

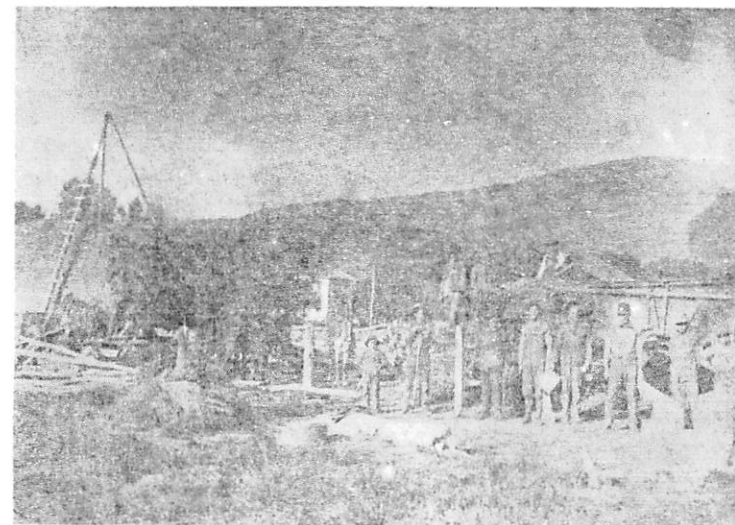


Early plastering crew: Alfred Duke, Robert McKnight, Teenie Duke, Joe Duke, John Duke, Jr. Teenie Duke was paper hanging,

Fraughton's which illustrates how well oxen could be handled. Fraughton was logging for one of the mills in the hollow. He was digging around a log to work a chain under it when the log rolled on his leg. He knew his leg would be severely injured if the log were not rolled off the same way. By working until he had a roll hitch on the log he was able, even in his lying position, to direct the oxen verbally in removing the log without injury to his leg.²²

²²Julia Anderson, "Lumbering in Wasatch County," MSS, (Daughters of Utah Pioneers Historical Collection, Heber, 1952), p. 18.

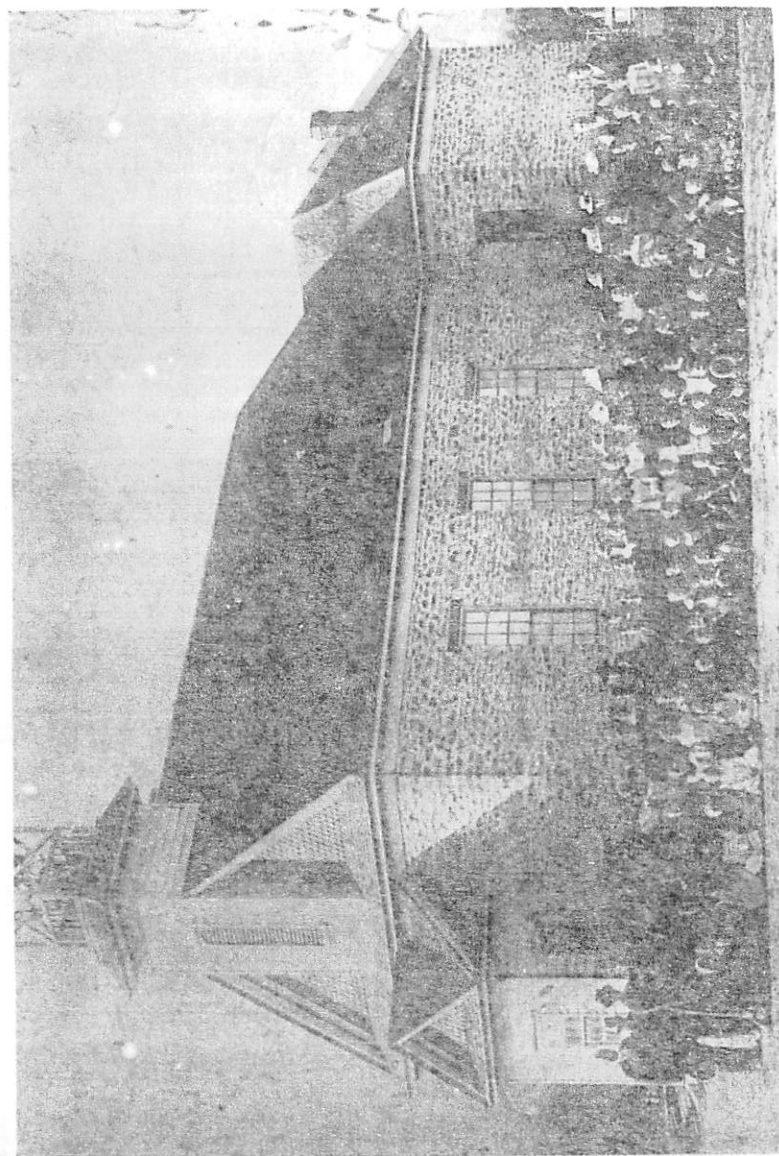
Life was hard at the lumber camps both for owner and laborers. The mill owner's family usually lived right at the mill and his wife or older daughters did the cooking for the crews.



Threshing crew in Midway

Sawed lumber was used as building material in the valley or shipped to some of the central Utah settlements. When mining activity in the Park City region began much of the lumber was shipped there for use in the mines. William Gardner, the early Mormon explorer of the valley, thought that timbers could be floated down the Provo River to the market in Provo City, but this did not prove practical.

Two special lumbering activities in the county were the manufacture of shingles from Engelmann spruce and excelsior packing from quaking aspen.



Charleston School and Church. Example of early Pot-rock construction.

Shingle mills were operated by Charles Thacker, John Campbell, Mr. Henry S. Alexander, and Herbert Clegg. Shingle timber had to be clear from knots, and straight grained. After the logs had been cleared they were hauled to the mill and there sawed by a dragsaw into sixteen-inch blocks. Once the blocks were prepared they were quartered with an ax and the heart wood taken out and placed in a steam box overnight to soften and draw out the sap so that the shingles would not split in use.

After softening to the consistency of cheese, the shingles were cut with a knife on a frame run by steam power. A man stood at a bench feeding the hot blocks to the knife, twisting the blocks back and forth and turning them over to keep the shingles even while forming the thick and thin ends. Then girls, who sat or kneeled on sacks filled with sawdust, placed the shingles in bunches of 250 each. A good buncher could bunch about 10,000 shingles a day at ten cents per thousand. For this dollar a day she worked from dawn until late at night, often by the light of a bonfire.²³ These shingles lasted 50 years.

Lumbering is still an important industry in the county. The major change from pioneer days has been the establishment of national forests resulting in the regulation of timber cutting.

TRAPPING

Among the early trappers in Provo Valley was a twelve year old boy, Eph Nelson, who trapped musk rats along the Provo River, the pelts from which he sold to A. Hatch and Co. for from three to five cents per pelt. In those early days there were no restrictions against fishing so he also caught fish which he took to Park City

²³*Ibid.*, p. 14.